

RENÉ LIVAS
rlivas@g.harvard.edu
+1 562-221-3633
<https://renelivas.com/>



HARVARD
UNIVERSITY

124 Mount Auburn St Cambridge, MA 02138
Placement Codirector: Mark Shepard mark_shepard@g.harvard.edu 617-496-5062
Placement Codirector: Joe Aldy joseph_aldy@hks.harvard.edu 617-496-7213
Director: Nicole Tateosian nicole_tateosian@hks.harvard.edu 617-495-1190

Education

Harvard University

Ph.D. Public Policy, Economics Track, 2020 to 2026 (expected)

Yale University

M.A. International and Development Economics, 2019

Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico

B.A. Economics, Highest Honors, 2016

Stanford University

Exchange student, Summer 2014

Fields

Primary: Urban Economics

Secondary: Labor Economics, International Trade

References

Prof. Gordon Hanson
Harvard Kennedy School
gordon_hanson@hks.harvard.edu

Prof. Edward L. Glaeser
Harvard University
eglaeser@harvard.edu

Prof. Gabriel Kreindler
Harvard University
gkreindler@g.harvard.edu

Gregory A. Bruich, Ph.D.
Harvard University
gbruich@fas.harvard.edu

Teaching

Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems, Harvard University
Teaching fellow (Undergraduate), Raj Chetty and Gregory Bruich, Spring 2024 and 2023

Econometrics I, Harvard University
Teaching fellow (Ph.D. level), Gregory Bruich, Fall 2023 and 2022

Intermediate Microeconomics, Universidad Iberoamericana
Lecturer (Undergraduate), Summer 2021

International Trade I, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM)
Lecturer (Undergraduate), Summer 2020

Relevant Experience

Research Associate, Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, Gordon Hanson, 2020-2025
Predoctoral Fellow, MIT, Simon Jaeger and Benjamin Schoefer, 2019-2020
Research Assistant, Banco de México, 2016-2018
Short Term Consultant, World Bank, 2016

**Job Market
Paper**

Local Taxes and Suburbanization: Evidence from Philadelphia's Wage Tax

with Matthew Jacob ([link to paper](#))

Do city taxes shift economic activity to the suburbs? We study Philadelphia's wage tax, which applies to residents regardless of where they work and to suburban residents who work in the city. Because city residents always pay the tax, it does not distort their workplace choices, whereas suburban residents are penalized only for working in Philadelphia. At the city boundary, rising wage tax rates should sharply reduce commuting to the city in suburban tracts relative to neighboring city tracts, while falling tax rates should increase it. Using a spatial regression discontinuity design, we find that as the wage tax rose from 1.5 to 4.3% between 1960 and 1980, the change in the proportion of residents working in the city fell sharply in suburban tracts just outside the boundary; as the tax fell to 3.4% between 2003 and 2019, the change in that proportion increased sharply in the same tracts. Similar results hold along the boundaries of other cities with wage tax variation, such as Detroit and Cleveland, but not in cities without wage taxes. In our preferred estimate, a 1% increase in the tax rate reduces suburb-to-city commuting by 6.39%, holding wages, rents, and amenities constant. We embed this elasticity in a quantitative spatial model to estimate how the wage tax affects suburbanization once wages and rents adjust. Replacing the wage tax with a non-distortionary land value tax would bring 26,000 jobs from the suburbs into Philadelphia. Such gains triple when we allow for productivity agglomeration forces.

**Working
Papers**

The Rise of the South and the Deindustrialization of the North

with Gordon Hanson ([link to paper](#))

During the middle of the 20th century, U.S. manufacturing reorganized itself. A substantial share of industrial jobs was reallocated from the U.S. North to the U.S. South, presaging the exodus of manufacturing from the global North to the global South that would occur several decades later. We study how the rise of the South affected labor market outcomes in the North after 1940, instrumenting for the South's industrial growth using insights from the literature on the region's structural transformation. Northern regions more exposed to the rise of the South saw larger declines in manufacturing employment, small offsetting gains in service employment, and decreases in overall employment rates that persisted to 1980. These changes were accompanied by reductions in wage and salary income among low-wage workers, which reached their peak impact in 1960. Impacts on earnings may have been offset by reductions in the cost of housing, whose impact peaked in 1960 but remained depressed through 1980. Consistent with the hypothesis of Wilson (1987) on the origins of urban decline in former industrial cities after 1960, adverse changes in Northern labor markets were followed by more intense rioting during the social upheaval of the late 1960s, increased uptake of government transfers, and reduced economic mobility of children born to low-income parents in the 1980 birth cohort relative to the 1940 birth cohort.

Automation Technologies and Employment at Risk

with Alfonso Cebreros, Aldo Heffner, and Daniela Puggioni

([Bank of Mexico Working Paper 2020-04](#))

**Papers in
Progress**

The Emergence of Public Transit and the Transformation of the American Downtown

with Prottoy Akbar and Allison Shertzer

Commuting technologies transformed American urban form in the half-century before 1930. Yet those transformations remain largely unmeasured. Using Philadelphia's city directories over 1887-1930, we use large language models to extract name, occupation, industry, employer, home address, and work address for roughly one million directory entries. We then study the response of establishment location and individual commuting to changes in transportation technologies. In preliminary work, we find that the electrification of streetcars 1) *centralized* service establishments, 2) had no effect on the location of manufacturing establishments, and 3) decentralized residences of workers regardless of occupation.

Seminars & Conferences	ASSA 2026 Annual Meeting, January 2026 Southern Economic Association 95th Annual Meeting, November 2025 Harvard Kennedy School Economics and Social Policy Seminar, September 2025
Academic Service	Referee, Journal of Urban Economics (x2) Vice-president, Kennedy PhD Student Association (KPSA), 2023-2024 Organizer, Harvard Urban Economics Reading Group, 2023-2024 Member, Dept. of Economics Technical Board, Universidad Iberoamericana, 2022-2025 Representative of the student body, Universidad Iberoamericana Senate, 2015-2016
Research Grants	Harvard Mellon Urban Initiative Doctoral Fellowship (\$3,250), 2025 Harvard Taubman Center for Local and State Government Fellowship (\$6,000), 2024 PhD Affiliate, Harvard Center for International Development, 2021-2026 Doctoral Fellow, Reimagining the Economy, 2021-2026
Fellowships & Awards	Victor L. Urquidi Prize (Honorable Mention), 2020 Harvard University Graduate Prize Fellowship, 2020 Universidad Iberoamericana Academic Scholarship, 2012-2016
Languages	English (native); Spanish (native)
Software skills	Stata, MATLAB, ArcGIS, Python, R, LaTeX
Personal information	Dual citizen of the U.S. and Mexico